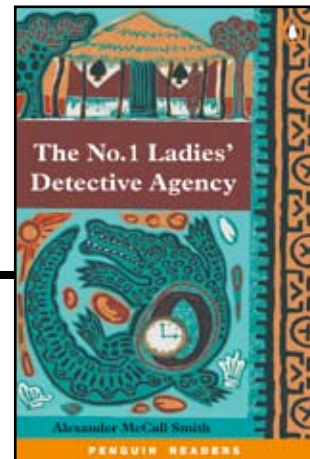


Penguin Readers Factsheets

Teacher's Notes

The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency

By Alexander McCall Smith



Level 3 – Pre-Intermediate The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency

Summary

The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency is the first in a series of books by Alexander McCall Smith about Mma (Mrs) Precious Ramotswe. This large African lady has an instinctive talent for solving mysteries, so she decides to set up the first (and only) ladies' detective agency in Botswana. The book follows the story of the agency in its early days, the mysteries that Mma Ramotswe is hired to solve and the growing friendship between the heroine and the charming Mr JLB Matekoni.

Most of the mysteries that Mma Ramotswe solves are not serious crimes. For example, a rich Indian gentleman asks her to spy on his daughter because he thinks she has a boyfriend. And a puzzled woman asks her to discover the true identity of the old man who calls himself her 'Daddy'. Mma Ramotswe also returns a stolen car to its owner, unravels an insurance scam and discovers some cheating doctors. Each of the stories is very charming, and the perpetrators of the crimes are often shown to be normal human beings with strengths as well as flaws in their characters.

There is also a very serious crime which Mma Ramotswe is asked to solve: a young boy goes missing but the police do not want to get involved. Then Mma Ramotswe's good friend, Mr JLB Matekoni, finds a witchdoctor's bag with a human bone in it. It seems that the boy has been kidnapped and murdered – and Mma Ramotswe and Mr JLB Matekoni begin the search for the boy's killers. They become involved with dangerous men and threatened with the dreadful power of witchcraft. The book ends dramatically with Mma Ramotswe rescuing the boy from slavery and reuniting him with his family.

Mma Ramotswe has a special friendship with Mr JLB Matekoni. He is quite similar to her father, who she loved more than anyone. But her father is dead now and Mma Ramotswe has lost much of her trust in men since she was abandoned by her abusive husband when she was younger. In the middle of the book, Mr JLB Matekoni proposes to Mma Ramotswe but she refuses. The book follows their developing friendship from this point until the end of the book, when Mma Ramotswe finally agrees to marry Mr JLB Matekoni.

About Alexander McCall Smith

Alexander McCall Smith is British but he was born in Zimbabwe (then called Southern Rhodesia). He went to school there and in Scotland. After university, he became a professor of law, working first in Scotland and later in Botswana. He has always loved Africa and its people, and he has written many stories about it for both children and adults. Mma Precious Ramotswe and many of the other characters in the book are based on real people.

The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency was published in the UK in 1998 and soon everyone was talking about Mma

Precious Ramotswe. *Tears of the Giraffe* and *Morality for Beautiful Girls* – also about Mma Ramotswe – soon followed. Suddenly, after years of writing, Alexander McCall Smith was a famous author. At the moment there are seven books about Mma Precious Ramotswe – and there are more to come!

Until 2004 Alexander McCall Smith was still working as a professor at university as well as writing books and newspaper stories. Later that year, he decided to stop teaching for a while to concentrate on his writing career. As well as the Mma Ramotswe books, he started a new series of books about a woman professor living in Edinburgh. He also continued writing *44 Scotland Street* – his popular daily story for *The Scotsman* newspaper.

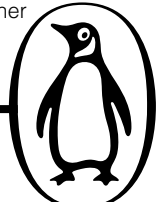
Alexander McCall Smith lives in Edinburgh with his wife and two daughters. Today, his books are enormously popular and Mma Precious Ramotswe is loved by readers all over the world.

Background and themes

Alexander McCall Smith has lived and worked in Africa often over his lifetime. He writes about Botswana with great affection for the country and its people. Mma Precious Ramotswe becomes a private detective because she loves the people of Africa and wants to help solve their problems. Although the book is light-hearted, it also touches on the larger problems in modern Africa. In *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* we hear about children being killed for *muti* (witchdoctor's medicine), for example, and the terrible disease, AIDS, which is killing tens of thousands of people in Botswana and South Africa every year. The book also describes the beauty of the Botswana countryside and the warmth and generosity of the people. Details of everyday objects, places and events help to create an atmospheric setting for the characters and story.

Human nature, and Mma Ramotswe's instinctive understanding of it, is an important theme in the book. She has known great love, great loss and great pain in her life so far. She knows that people can be good and generous, but she knows they can be weak, selfish and cruel too. As well as solving problems, Mma Ramotswe likes to deliver justice. She doesn't tell the police about Solomon Moretsi because his crime doesn't hurt anybody and he is only trying to support his family. But she is very happy to drive away, leaving the witchdoctor's wife in the desert, because she knows she is a cruel and greedy woman.

Truth and lies is another important theme in the book. Many characters lie in order to get what they want: Happy Bapetsi's 'Daddy' lies about his own identity in order to have an easy life, Nandira Patel lies in order to keep her boyfriend a secret from her father and Solomon Moretsi lies in order to get insurance money for his family. Mma Ramotswe often tells small



Penguin Readers Factsheets

Teacher's Notes

lies too. She strongly believes that 'lies are all right if you are lying for a good reason'. Mr JLB Matekoni, however, finds it very difficult to lie. It is a strong indication of his love for Mma Ramotswe that he is prepared to lie when she asks him to.

Alexander McCall Smith creates a wonderful sense of community in the novel by including a range of characters that interact and help one another. Not only does Mma Ramotswe get help from her friends (Billy Pilani, Dr Gulubane), but also from strangers. When a snake gets stuck in her car, she soon gets help from another driver. Although there are some cruel characters in the book, most of the people in it are good and helpful. Mma Ramotswe thinks of her African friends and neighbours as her 'brothers and sisters' and this optimistic tone makes the book uplifting and inspiring to read.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopyable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class Readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/group work questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- 1 Ask students to read the word list on page 58. Whilst they read, write the words (but not the definitions) up on the board. Split the class into two teams and make sure that everyone understands the new words. Then invite a student to come to the front of the class and describe one of the words to the rest of the class. The other students try to guess the word. If a student guesses correctly they win one point for their team. The teams take it in turns to describe the words until there is none left.
- 2 Put students into pairs. Each pair chooses a picture from the book and looks at it carefully for three minutes. After three minutes, student A takes the book and asks student B questions about the picture. Student B should answer as many questions as possible without looking at the book.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1–2

In the first two chapters of the book, we learn about three very different men: Mma Ramotswe's father, Happy Bapetsi's 'Daddy' and Note Makoti. Ask students to work in small groups. They should think about the similarities and differences between the three men and make notes on a piece of paper. Then choose one student from each group to stand up and say something about one or some of the men to the rest of the class.

Chapters 3–4

Students work individually. They should write an article for the newspaper in Gaborone about the No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency. People will be interested to read about the new business in town and the article should also cover the agency's first case – the death of Peter Malatsi. Students should imagine an interview with Mma Ramotswe and include some quotes from her in the article.

Chapters 5–6

Students work in pairs. Ask them to prepare and then act out the following conversation:

Student A: You are Nandira Patel. You are a modern young woman and you want to choose your own friends. You want to marry your boyfriend, Jack. Talk to your father and try to explain your views. Will he let you marry Jack?

Student B: You are Mr Patel. You love your daughter, Nandira, and you want her to have good friends. You want to choose a good husband for her too. You don't know her boyfriend, Jack. Now, Nandira wants to marry Jack. Will you let her?

Chapters 7–8

'Lies are alright if you are lying for a good reason.' Ask students to think about their own lives. Have they ever lied for a good reason? Why did they choose to lie? Did it help? What happened? Students should write a few sentences about a lie they have told in the past. Then choose some students to tell the rest of the class about their lie and encourage whole class discussion. Was the person right to tell the lie? Why/why not?

Chapters 9–10

Write these names and words on the board:

the witchdoctor the teacher from Katsana
the Basarwa Mr JLB Matekoni Charlie Gotso

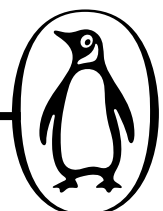
Divide the class into five groups. Each group should think about one of these people and their involvement in the story about the missing boy. How are they important? How do they feel about the missing boy? How do they feel about each other? Encourage students to discuss these questions in their groups. Then students should write a short paragraph about their character. This can be done in class or for homework.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- 1 Students work in pairs. Ask them to fold a piece of paper in half to make two columns. Label the first column 'Botswana' and the second column 'My country'. Students should then think of as many differences as possible between Botswana and their own country. (If a pair of students are from different countries, they should choose just one of the countries for this exercise.) After about ten minutes, ask students to share their ideas with the rest of the class. Encourage discussion.
- 2 Discussion: Some people in Botswana believe in the power of *muti*. Ask students if they know anything about witchcraft in Africa or anywhere else in the world. Does it really work? What animals and objects do people use for witchcraft? Why doesn't Mr JLB Matekoni like talking about it? Why is it still popular in some countries? Why is it less popular in others?

Word list

It will be useful for your students to know the new words found on page 58 of the Reader. They are practised in the 'Before you read' sections at the back of the book. (The definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

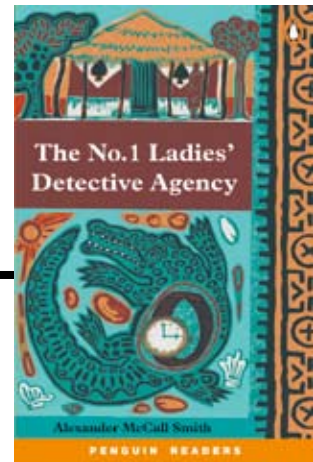


Penguin Readers Factsheets

Student's Activities

The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency

By Alexander McCall Smith



These activities can be done alone or with one or more other students.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- 1 Read the back cover of the book carefully. Now turn it over and read these sentences about Precious Ramotswe. Are they true (T) or false (F)?
 - (a) Precious is kind, warm-hearted and quite thin.
 - (b) She lives and works in Botswana, in Africa.
 - (c) She works alone in the No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency.
 - (d) She solves a number of difficult problems in her own special way.
 - (e) Her work is difficult, but it is never dangerous.
- 2 What do you know about Botswana? Write a few sentences about the country. Look at the map on page vi to help you. Look in other books and on the Internet too.

ACTIVITIES WHILE READING THE BOOK

Chapter 1

- 1 Complete these sentences. Use these words.

cattle clients mines mysteries worries

- (a) Mma Ramotswe helps African people solve the _____ of their lives.
 - (b) The dust from the _____ destroyed Mma Ramotswe's father's body.
 - (c) Mma Ramotswe sells her father's _____ and starts a detective agency.
 - (d) At first business was slow, but then more _____ came to the No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency.
 - (e) Happy Bapetsi is an intelligent woman with few _____.
- 2 Happy Bapetsi meets her 'Daddy' when she is thirty-eight years old. How does she feel at first? How do her feelings change after three months? How does she feel at the end of the story, do you think?

Chapter 2

- 1 Read this paragraph about Chapter 2. There are 10 wrong words. Circle them and write the correct words.

Precious Ramotswe's father died when she was very young. Her father's sister looked after the family. She was clever and kind. Precious learned to sing before she went to school. She learned about the difference between

right and wrong at Saturday school. When Precious was sixteen, the cousin got married. After school, Precious lived with the cousin and worked in the taxi company. She always worked as slowly as she could. One day, Precious found a mistake of two thousand pula. A man lost his job – and it was the beginning of Precious' bank work. Precious married Note Makoti, but he was a bad man. One day he hit her and she had to go to the hotel. Sadly, Mma Ramotswe and Note Makoti's baby lived for only two days.

- 2 Why does Precious Ramotswe marry Note Makoti, do you think? And why does Note Makoti leave Precious Ramotswe? Try to find three reasons for each.

Chapter 3

- 1 Look at the picture on page 11 for one minute. Now, close your book and write about Mma Ramotswe's detective agency. What can you see in the room? What can you see out of the window? Write as much as you can.
- 2 Why are these things important in the story?
 - (a) Reverend Shadreck Mapeli's Christian group
 - (b) the river
 - (c) a large, yellow dog
 - (d) Mma Ramotswe's father's gun
 - (e) a crocodile
 - (f) a man's watch

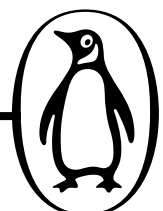
Chapter 4

- 1 Choose the right answer.
 - (a) Ernest Molai Pakotati does not pay Mma Ramotswe because he is
 - (1) not rich. (2) afraid. (3) dead.
 - (b) Mma Makutsi heard about the missing boy from
 - (1) the teacher's wife. (2) Mr JLB Matekoni. (3) the newspaper.
 - (c) Mma Ramotswe and Mr JLB Matekoni always talked about
 - (1) local news. (2) business. (3) witchdoctors.
 - (d) Witchdoctors make medicine for
 - (1) missing children. (2) the police. (3) rich people.

- 2 Write about Mr JLB Matekoni. Why does Mma Ramotswe like him, do you think?

Chapter 5

- 1 Mma Ramotswe says she is a 'modern lady'. Do you agree? Why/why not?



Penguin Readers Factsheets

Student's Activities

2 When did these things happen? Number the sentences from 1–10.

- Mma Ramotswe starts reading *Snakes of Botswana*.
- Mr Patel shows Mma Ramotswe a photo of his daughter, Nandira.
- Mma Ramotswe goes to the cinema and Nandira sits next to her.
- Mma Ramotswe follows Nandira but she loses her on a quiet road.
- Mrs Patel finds a note from 'Jack'.
- Mr Patel takes Mma Ramotswe into his private office.
- Mma Ramotswe tells Mr Patel 'There is no boyfriend.'
- Mma Ramotswe meets Nandira and Jack in the President Hotel.
- Nandira and her friend go into the Botswana Book Centre.
- Mma Ramotswe gives ten pula to a woman in a dress shop.

Chapter 6

1 Who says these things? What are they talking about?

- 'All wives are worried about their husbands. You are not alone.'
- 'I want to give the car back to its owner.'
- 'They are painted with a different colour and their number plates are changed.'
- 'They will send one of their men to pick it up.'
- 'Mma Pkwane has done as I asked.'
- 'Maybe later.'
- 'That will not be a mistake.'

2 You are Mma Ramotswe. Why don't you want to marry Mr JLB Matekoni? Write a letter to him. He is an important friend and you don't want to hurt him. Think carefully about your words before you write.

Chapter 7

1 Finish these sentences about Chapter 7 in your own words.

- Hector Lepodise doesn't want to pay Moretsi because
- Mma Ramotswe cannot sleep because
- Mma Ramotswe stops her van because
- Mma Ramotswe feels sorry for Moretsi's lawyer because
- Moretsi claimed for his lost finger three times because
- Mma Ramotswe does not tell the police about Moretsi because

2 At the end of Chapter 7 Mma Ramotswe says 'I killed a big snake on the way here today.' Is this true? Why does she say this, do you think?

Chapter 8

1 Answer these questions.

- What does Mr JLB Matekoni find in the car?
- Why does he show the *muti* to Mma Ramotswe?
- Does Mr JLB Matekoni believe in witchdoctors' medicine?
- Where does Mma Ramotswe keep the bone?
- What does Dr Gulubane say about the bone?
- What does Mr JLB Matekoni do to Charlie Gotso's car?

(g) Who comes to see the broken window?

(h) Why does Charlie Gotso tell Mma Ramotswe the witchdoctor's address?

2 Write a conversation between Charlie Gotso and his man. The man tells Charlie Gotso about his car and the missing bag. What does Charlie say? What does he think about the lady detective? How does he feel about the missing bag?

Chapter 9

1 Read these sentences about Chapter 9 and choose true (T) or false (F).

- Dr Maketsi thinks Dr Komoti is taking drugs.
- Dr Komoti drives to South Africa to collect drugs.
- Mma Ramotswe can't go to South Africa because she doesn't have her passport.
- Mma Ramotswe lived in Dr Komoti's house when she was a child.
- Dr Komoti took two jobs – one in Gaborone and one in Nairobi.
- Dr Komoti's brother did not pass his exams.
- The people in the Princess Marina Hospital didn't know there were two doctors.
- Mma Ramotswe tells the police in Botswana and South Africa about Dr Komoti.

2 Mma Ramotswe solves mysteries in her own special way. How does she solve this mystery? Think about the other mysteries in the book. Does she solve them in the same way?

Chapter 10

1 Who ...

- is in Lobatse until Saturday?
- gives Mma Ramotswe a cup of water?
- drives across country to the cattle farm?
- works for the Basarwa?
- bought a bone from the witchdoctor?
- hits the boy all the time?
- shouts wildly when he sees the boy?
- repairs Mma Ramotswe's tiny white van?
- means everything to Mr JLB Matekoni?

2 At the end of the book, Mma Ramotswe agrees to marry Mr JLB Matekoni. Will they be happy together do you think? Give reasons for your answer.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

1 Who is your favourite character in the book? Who is your least favourite? Write a few sentences about each character. Why do you like them or not like them?

2 Choose one of the pictures in the book. Write about the picture and try to explain the story. Who are the people in the picture? Where are they? What are they doing? What happens next?

3 Look at the Contents on page iii. Can you remember all the mysteries? Choose your favourite mystery and write a few sentences about it.

